

**Trans-border Conservation in Central Africa and Sustainable Forest Management: On the Ground
Efforts to Control the Bushmeat trade**

Testimony of

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On

The Bushmeat trade in Central Africa

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Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am Dr. Richard Carroll, Director for West and Central Africa and Madagascar at the World Wildlife Fund. WWF is the largest private conservation organization working internationally to protect wildlife and wildlife habitats. We currently sponsor conservation programs in more than 100 countries, thanks to support of 1.2 million members in the United States and more than 5 million members worldwide.

We are here today to discuss the devastating impact of the bushmeat trade in Africa and some solutions to protect the many species affected by this trade. We are also here to discuss the future of millions of Africans who depend on forest products for their livelihoods. The United States, primarily through programs administered by the Fish and Wildlife Service and USAID -- in particular, CARPE -- has played a critical role in the protection and conservation of the forest and its wildlife. World Wildlife Fund strongly urges that these programs be increased and expanded to firmly establish a network of ecologically representative protected areas spanning the Congo Basin.

The Bushmeat Crisis in the Congo Basin

- The Bushmeat Crisis in the Congo Basin is a human health and food security issue, an economic and political issue as well as an urgent ecological issue. The bushmeat trade is the leading cause of biodiversity loss in the Congo Basin and is driven by an accelerating logging industry and growing human population.
- Approximately 20 million people depend on the resources of the forest for food, materials and shelter. Consumption of bushmeat is estimated to be about one million metric tonnes per year. As human populations are expected to double in the next 25 years, if

no alternatives are found to the bushmeat crisis, it will spell extinction of most wildlife species and result in a massive food disaster.

- If the demand for bushmeat continues to grow as expected, and consumers do not switch to the meat of domestic animals, we can expect that apes and most large bodied forest mammals will be eradicated from the forest, throughout much of the region.
- The bushmeat problem covers both subsistence hunting and commercial hunting. Commercial hunting supplies urban markets in the African countries themselves, and even serves consumption needs abroad where there are large expatriate populations of Africans.
- Projections of future logging trends suggest that an estimated 70 percent of the region's forests could be lost by 2040 unless large-scale changes aimed at conserving the forest and the livelihoods of its native people are taken now.
- At the local level, bushmeat is a survival issue. Simple subsistence is no longer possible. All communities and all families are part of the cash economy, however modestly. Families must pay school fees, buy medicines, purchase salt, sugar, soap and kerosene.
- Civil conflict both stems from and creates resource degradation. Increasingly, military weapons are used by commercial poachers, especially for large animals such as elephants. Most illegal shooting of bushmeat still takes place with shotguns using shells manufactured in Congo or Nigeria. Pressure should be brought to close these factories and limit the availability of hunting apparatus such as steel cable used for snares.
- Logging companies are showing an increasing willingness to collaborate, especially on reduction of bushmeat hunting on their concessions. Examples are the work of WCS in Congo and of WWF with a Malaysian company near the Minkebe reserve in Gabon. These methods hold promise for replication throughout the priority regions.
- The chimpanzee and other primates have been suggested as potential vectors for the emerging diseases related to HIV/AIDs and the recent outbreaks of Ebola have been linked to the handling and eating of wildlife.
- For forest people like the BaAka pygmies, whose cultural, physical and spiritual life depends on an intact forest, forest and wildlife depletion means cultural extinction of these forest peoples.
- WWF is working with governments and private railway companies in Cameroon and Gabon to reduce transport of bushmeat.
- In terms of GDP, all sub-Saharan countries allocate a relatively larger percentage of their budgets to national protected area systems than do either the United States or Canada.
- The Yaounde Heads of State Summit and Declaration have raised the political commitment to conservation in the Congo Basin by a quantum leap and has presented a unique opportunity to establish a coherent conservation plan for the Congo Basin. This plan calls for a regional network of transborder and other protected areas, a halt to uncontrolled and illegal logging, and hunting and greater integration of local populations and the private sector in forest management.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT: BIODIVERSITY AND RESOURCES IN THE FORESTS OF CENTRAL AFRICA

Stretching from the Mountains of the Moon in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo to the coast of the Gulf of Guinea, the Congo Basin contains a quarter of the world's tropical forests, covering 2.8 million square kilometers. Forest covers almost 50 percent of the landmass spanning the political boundaries of Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Congo Basin is exceeded in size only by the Amazon Basin. The tropical forest block also contains some of the richest biodiversity in Africa, which includes countless plant, animal, and insect species. The region harbors the most diverse assemblage of plants and animals in Africa, with more than 1,000 species of birds and over 10,000 plant species of which about 3,000 are endemic to the region. The forests are home to about 400 mammal species, including intact populations of large mammals, such as forest elephants, gorillas, bongos and buffaloes. They are also important as a source of food, materials and shelter for over 20 million people.

The Central African forests are home to some of the most spectacular and endangered wildlife species in Africa, including one half of the remaining elephants on the continent. A keystone species of these forests are the forest elephants, which create habitat for other wildlife and disperse seeds. Also making their home in this region are the three subspecies of gorilla: the endangered mountain gorilla, the eastern lowland gorilla and the more numerous western lowland gorilla. Other terrestrial wildlife found in the Congo Basin are chimpanzees, bonobo, okapi, and bongo. The rivers of Central Africa harbor some of the richest concentrations of the world's aquatic biodiversity, most of which is endemic. Plant species in the Congo Basin, many with medicinal properties, are numerous and continue to be discovered.

In addition to the myriad species of flora and fauna, the Congo Basin is home to people representing a range of ethnic groups, including the many different groups of indigenous hunter-gatherer people. The BaAka are one such group whose lives and well-being -- physical, cultural, and spiritual -- are intimately linked with the forests. The forest also represents great economic importance and promise to these people and their countries.

The Congo Basin is also extremely rich in natural resources. The region's crude oil production surpassed four million barrels a day in 2000, more than Iran, Venezuela or Mexico. The United States gets 16 percent of its oil from sub-Saharan Africa -- almost equaling imports from Saudi Arabia. By 2015, it is expected that the region will supply the United States with 25 percent of its oil -- surpassing the Persian Gulf. The vast majority of this oil will come from the Gulf of Guinea, in the Congo Basin.

Development of this strategic resource area is vital to America's national security. However, unless conservation of the rainforest is expanded now, one resource will simply be traded for another. Both can be used; one can be saved.

WHY IT IS THREATENED: BUSHMEAT, LOGGING, POPULATION GROWTH AND RESOURCE EXTRACTION

Central African forests are under threat by a multitude of factors. Almost four million hectares of Africa's forests are destroyed each year as a result of forest clearance for agriculture to feed the growing number of people in the region. Mineral and oil extraction, unsustainable logging and pervasive political instability are other factors. Road building by logging companies penetrates into the heart of previously remote forests and gives easy access to commercial hunters and buyers of bush meat. This, combined with a lack of surveillance, has led to extreme over-hunting in Central Africa's forests of such vulnerable species as the western lowland gorilla, elephant and leopard. The chimpanzee -- recently disclosed as the potential source of the HIV 1 virus in humans and vital to medical research -- is also severely endangered; its forest home is being logged and it continues to be hunted and sold as food in Central Africa. With human populations growing at 2-3percent and subsistence level agriculture still the predominant source of food and income for the majority of Central Africans, habitat loss as a result of forest conversion to agriculture, and climate change are likely to be the most significant long term threats to biodiversity. The immediate threats are illegal logging and commercial hunting and trading of wildlife for meat and ivory facilitated by logging operations.

Logging is an economically important land-use throughout Central Africa. All nations within the region are dependent on extractive industries for a large percentage of their Gross Domestic Product, almost all foreign exchange, and much of the tax revenues that finance government expenses. Logging companies have control over 50-80 percent of the forests outside protected areas. In many cases, poor management practices and technical shortcomings cause needless damage and degradation in and around logging concessions, while many operations are carried out in violation of forestry regulations. Although it contributes significantly to national economies and, to some extent, to local needs, illegal logging has a particularly devastating impact on biodiversity. Illegal logging deliberately targets the remaining pristine forests, including protected areas. Available data indicate that deforestation rates were relatively low until the 1980s, but increased rapidly during the 1990s. This rate is still increasing.

Logging industries directly and indirectly facilitate a large increase in commercial bushmeat hunting. While the hunting of bushmeat has been a traditional livelihood for forest indigenous people, in particular pygmies, the development of a large-scale commercial trade in bushmeat is relatively recent and has been facilitated by the development of logging roads deep into the forest. Current logging practices not only result in increased consumption of bushmeat within concession areas but also facilitate the supply of bushmeat to urban markets and enhance the profitability of the trade.

This alarming level of threat is caused by many inter-linked factors. In general, national governments have continued the forest exploitation policies introduced last century by the colonial powers. They are supported and encouraged in this by multilateral and

bilateral institutions, to which they are heavily indebted, as part of the structural adjustment policies and economic liberalization programs imposed as a condition of further lending. Thus, the primary goal of forest policies in the region is to promote industrial timber production for export by allocating most of the forest as logging concessions. Unfortunately, the policy, institutional and legal frameworks for controlling private sector interests and enforcing conservation regulations are extremely weak. As a result, illegal logging practices have flourished throughout the Congo Basin, combined with unsustainable use of other wild resources by a growing population with few economic alternatives to face rising poverty. Other root causes include the lack of technical, scientific and financial resources and, in some countries, political instability and recent wars.

Neglecting the threats from unsustainable forestry operations in the short and medium term will not only undermine the efforts to reduce poverty but will create more poverty. The result of this will be more instability in the Congo Basin. The costs for mitigating the impacts of forestry operations will be much cheaper now than later – within the next 10 or 20 years deforestation is likely to be at the maximum. It is critical to urgently mobilize resources to implement a comprehensive strategy to protect the invaluable forests and associated resources within the Congo Basin.

WHAT CAN BE DONE: CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION, PROTECTED AREAS AND SUSTAINABLE LOGGING

The Yaounde Summit

The Congo Basin is a challenging environment for forest conservation. Political instability, high levels of government debt, a decline in export commodity prices and a long history of poor resource management have led some analysts to wonder if conservation can actually happen. However, the good news is that low population densities and large areas of intact forests provide an excellent starting point for forest protection.

One of the most encouraging signs is the growing support among governments and communities in Central Africa for region-wide, collaborative forest conservation. A promising first step was taken in 1996 when the Ministers of Forestry, NGOs and international organizations signed an international declaration for forest conservation -- The Brazzaville Process. Coordinated by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), this provides a forum for governments and other stakeholders to work together on forest conservation in the region. What was urgently needed, however, was higher level commitments to forest conservation that could be turned into practical action on the ground.

The Yaounde Forest Summit held on March 17, 1999, hosted by President Paul Biya of Cameroon and chaired by HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, was the first public expression of the high level political will to conserve the forests of Central Africa. The Summit created a unique opportunity for the governments of countries of the Congo Basin to make commitments to forest conservation. Bringing together six African Heads of state and representatives from the international community including the World Bank, the United Nations and European Commission, the summit's aim was: To discuss and conclude new trans-national protected areas in the Congo Basin and agree upon a shared, long-term vision for these forests.

The Yaounde Summit marked a watershed in forest conservation in Central Africa. The summit opened a new era of 'conservation convergence' in Central Africa and was the first time that regional Heads of State came together to develop a coherent plan for the conservation of the second largest contiguous forest in the world. World Wildlife Fund helped organize the summit and the resulting Yaounde Declaration contained plans to protect vast tracts of forest in the Congo Basin. The summit marked a turning point in the political commitment to the region's environment. A key element is that Central African Governments have set aside areas of great economic value to themselves that are of global biodiversity significance.

Far from being "a series of empty promises," the Yaounde Declaration has resulted in solid conservation achievements in Central Africa. The total amount of additional forest protected areas created, confirmed or in the final stages of gazettment since March 1999 totals 13,866 square miles! In Cameroon alone three new national parks and a gorilla sanctuary have been created. Two other national parks are in the final stages of gazettment. Six new protected areas have been created, covering an area of 5,759 square miles (or 3 percent of the national territory). Furthermore, these areas represent economic forests that have been set aside for conservation in an area where public auction of logging concessions yields offers of the equivalent of \$21 per hectare, representing foregone income to the Cameroon Government of over \$30 million. In a further indication of political will, the government has recently withdrawn eight logging concessions in an ecologically sensitive area and is negotiating with conservation agencies to find ecologically acceptable alternatives to logging.

Other countries in the region (Gabon, Congo, Equatorial Guinea) have also increased their protected areas in response to the Yaounde Declaration. In the Congo Republic in December 2000, the government announced that it would quadruple the size of the Odzala National Park to over one million hectares, thereby creating one of the largest national parks in Central Africa.

Regional officials took another major step forward in December 2000. A collaborative management agreement between the governments of Cameroon, Central African Republic and Congo has been signed, creating the Sangha River Trinational, which links three contiguous national parks (Lobeke in Cameroon, Dzanga-Ndoki in Central African Republic and Nouabale-Ndoki in the Congo Republic) protecting 2.8 million hectares extending into all three countries. A similar transborder conservation program covering 15,000 square miles in the boundary region of Cameroon, Gabon and Congo is currently being negotiated. Africa already spends a greater relative proportion of its GNP on its protected areas than does Europe and the United States combined.

Tropical forests represent not only reservoirs of biodiversity but are also important economic resources. Forest exploitation will continue. Recent experiences in Congo (Nouabale-Ndoki) and Gabon (Minkebe) show that logging companies are increasingly willing to collaborate with conservationists and that when agreements are established, they can effectively control the level of bushmeat hunting.

While Africa has shown considerable political will in creating this protected area network, it is clear that demographic trends and the need for agricultural land are unlikely to result in more than 10 percent of the African territory being set aside for protected areas in the long term.

Conservation in Central Africa should concentrate on securing protected areas and in ensuring that they are well-managed and effectively protected. Central Africa is one of the last remaining areas in the world where vast, fairly intact forest still exist. We have the unique opportunity and political momentum to support the positive efforts fostered within the region to create a world class network of protected areas spanning much of the central African forests, linked by corridors of sustainably managed forests. The potential represented by the Yaounde Summit may be the last window of opportunity for conservation in central Africa and writing it off as 'empty promises' will certainly result in an empty forest.

We live in a world filled with bad news, especially the news which comes from much of Central Africa. It is easy to write these countries off as a loss. I submit that the results demonstrated from the Yaounde Summit represent a great glimmer of hope for the forest, wildlife and people of the region and the world should come to their aid. Failure to substantively act now will be a failure for the international community and an irretrievable loss for humanity.

WWF and its partners recognize that protected areas alone are not sufficient to conserve biodiversity or to ensure the continued provision of vital goods and services from the forest. For this reason, WWF seeks to promote more sustainable management of the vast majority of the world's forest that remain outside of protected areas.

Sustainable Forest Management

The forests of Central Africa are currently under threat from logging as a result of demand for timber from transnational logging companies in Asia and Europe. In 1990, the volume of timber exported from the Congo Basin to Asia was less than 200,000 cubic meters. In 1997, this has risen to over two million cubic meters. Today, in Gabon, 800,000 hectares of forests are allocated to logging concessions and this is likely to increase to more than two million hectares under current pressures. In neighboring Equatorial Guinea, exports have tripled since 1994. A growing demand for timber in China and other emerging economies has led to exploitation of forests in West Africa's coastal states -- where traditionally there have been weak controls and legislation -- mobilizing major capital resources with unprecedented speed and flexibility, and exploiting greater proportions of timber resources than ever before. Conservationists predict that most forests which are not currently designated as protected areas will be subject to some logging activity within the next five years.

WWF is promoting sustainable forest management in Cameroon, CAR and Gabon through a collaborative program between WWF Belgium, the WWF-Cameroon Program Office and the WWF-Central Africa Regional Program Office funded by the European Union. In each country, national working groups have been established to develop regional certification standards under the auspices of the Forest Stewardship Council. In addition, WWF is providing support to one private logging company in Gabon to design a sustainable forest management plan which takes into account the impact of the logging activity on biodiversity and the local

population.

In CAR, WWF, in partnership with the government, is working to promote sustainable management of the Societe de Bois de Bayanga logging concession within the Dzanga-Sangha Dense Forest Special Reserve. The Dzanga-Sangha Project is charged with assisting in the control of logging operations to ensure that the practices are consistent with the Forestry Code and with assisting in the development of a sustainable forest management plan for this concession.

In Cameroon, WWF is implementing the Jengi initiative, a pilot project to establish sustainable forest management and a protected areas system in the forests of south-eastern Cameroon. Although the Lake Lobeke Reserve (part of the Sangha River Trinational Protected Areas complex) and Boumba-Bek-Nki Complex (a component of the trans border initiative) will preserve part of this forest and help ensure a homeland for the BaAka pygmies, the speed and nature of current commercial logging, if unchecked, will result in three forest islands in a sea of devastation.

Jengi to the BaAka is the spirit of the forest. Jengi presides over the initiation ceremonies of youth and provides guidance for these forest people whose cultural, physical and spiritual life depends on an intact forest. The BaAka have lived in harmony with the forest for centuries and now their songs are being drowned by the noise of bulldozers and chainsaws. Poaching camps follow the bulldozers, the wildlife disappears, and in many villages, the Jengi has not come for years. The Jengi project aims to halt and reverse forest mining, to achieve large-scale sustainable forest management and timber production, to develop alternative sources of income for local communities and to develop a conservation trust fund to support the three protected areas. The aim is to restore the Jengi as the guardian of the forest.

Most of the protected areas in Central Africa are surrounded or impacted in some way by logging concessions. Logging operations often bring in a significant immigrant labor force and become a pole of attraction for others seeking economic opportunities with these companies. Those that find work have money to buy food and clothes, and those that don't have time to kill – literally -- by becoming bush meat hunters to supply the concession work force. In many concessions, bush meat is the only source of protein available and is sanctioned by the companies, who are responsible to ensure adequate food and supplies to their laborers.

Although to date, the forest certification process has had limited success in Central Africa due to a reluctance by companies to adopt logging practices that may be more costly and where there is limited market demand for certified products, we have found a willingness by companies to try to limit bush meat hunting and transportation on their concessions. Concessions bordering the Minkebe Forest Reserve in Gabon, the Dzanga-Sangha Reserve in CAR, Lake Lobeke in Cameroon and Nouabale-Ndoki in Congo-Brazzaville have all put in place measures to control bush meat exploitation, including sanctions of employees and drivers involved in hunting or transportation, closing roads to prevent access, providing alternative food sources, and closer collaboration with international NGOs and government authorities.

Congo Basin Initiative

Overall, the key to conservation of the forests of the Congo Basin is the development of a network of ecologically representative, financially viable, protected areas spanning the basin, from the Mountains of the Moon to the Gulf of Guinea, connected by conservation corridors of sustainably managed forests. Over the next month, WWF, WCS and CI will submit a joint proposal to the U.S. government and to private sector donors to co-fund this program. If funded, this program will have a profoundly beneficial impact on the environmental and economic welfare of the Congo Basin.

WWF, WCS and CI believe that expanded U.S. support for the Congo Basin Initiative will demonstrate the leadership role that the United States can and is playing in environmental conservation. U.S. support of this initiative will have a prominent impact at the upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg later this year.

The tangible benefits of this project will be:

- Over 30 million acres of functioning national park land in five Congo Basin countries.
- Over 60 million acres of managed logging concessions in surrounding areas.
- Increased number of host governments in natural resource management.
- Significant shift in land-use management practices in host countries.

- Significant and vibrant eco-tourism industry established.
- Increased sustainability from tourism revenue.

The more intangible benefits of this project will be:

- Reduced rates of deforestation.
- Vast reduction in biodiversity loss.
- Increased U.S. presence and economic opportunities.
- Better governance and transparency.
- Significantly increased security over vast areas of forest.
- Reduction of increase in levels of communicable diseases.
- Sustainable development based on renewable outputs.

In 1995, a USAID program called CARPE was created for Central Africa. This program was designed to increase forest management in the Congo Basin and its extreme success has been documented. WWF, WCS and CI believe that this program should be expanded and extended to coincide with the pressures being put on the Congo Basin from development and other human factors. WWF and other organizations are also seeking vastly increased funding for the African Elephant and Great Ape Conservation Acts. These programs managed through the US Fish and Wildlife service have been extremely instrumental in protection of these keystone species and helping to stem the bushmeat tide.

In closing, Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, WWF wishes to express our gratitude for your active interest in helping governments in the Congo Basin region to address the bushmeat crisis. We stand ready to assist the committee in providing constructive solutions to this serious problem.